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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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TO : Department of State

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PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

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PUBLISHING & REPRO. SERVICES DIVISION

File

FROM : Amembassy GUATEMALA

DATE: February 2, 1970

SUBJECT: INTERNAL SECURITY: Monthly Report of Incidents, December 1969

REF :

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF
INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS
FEB 5 1970

SUMMARY

While the extremely sharp increase of violence recorded on the enclosed chart for the Guatemala area may exaggerate the nationwide incidence of terrorism during December, it accurately reflects the surge of tension which gripped the City just before Christmas. Shortly after the President invoked his emergency powers on December 17, however, the pace of terrorism nosedived -- though the City's pulse was still racing at year's end -- and a modicum of tranquility had returned, a trend which became more pronounced as early January passed in relative quiet. Meanwhile, a band of guerrillas continued to elude the Armed Forces in northern Quiche and Alta Verapaz. In spite of reports that government troops were close on their heels, the only casualties to date have been four Guatemalan paratroopers who drowned and an innocent boat attendant mistakenly shot by troops in early January. Another group ambushed a military police (PMA) patrol on the San Marcos-Quezaltenango border killing the PMA officers but losing three men in the assault.

* * * *

1. Frequent caveats have appeared in reports in this series to the effect that, while the chart shows trends in the pace of violence, the actual numbers should be regarded as approximations. December 1969 provides a particularly good case in

- Enclosures: *2*
1. Chart of Incidents
 2. Index of Messages

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Clearances:

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point. The exceptionally high level shown for Guatemala City is a result of the tally system by which each of an estimated twenty incendiary devices placed on December 19 and 20 have been added individually. Five victims were recorded in the gunfight near the home of Vice-Minister of Government on December 12, and each of five bombs set at telephone switch-boxes the evening of the 13th are included. But the statistics do reflect the wave of apprehension and fear almost palpably cresting and breaking in the capital during the pre-Christmas period. On the other hand, it is fair to guess (but impossible to verify) that violence in rural areas was under-reported during the period as reporters took vacations and security forces downplayed incidents in order to encourage calm.

2. The messages included in the enclosed Index have detailed many of the facts as we know them surrounding the assassinations, arson and major bombings during the period from December 9 through 20, but several points should be stressed. First is the impression of spontaneity in some of the attacks; second, the timing and its impact upon the depth of the popular reaction; and third, the relatively brief duration of the terrorist activity.

3. The picture that fuzzily emerges from the December events seems to indicate that while very broad and general policy may be agreed upon, strategic planning for attacks has been replaced by tactical decisions of unit leaders seemingly sparked by a series of fortuitous events. Various and sundry operations long simmering within various cells are put into practice once one group moves. This, of course, is not to say that the plans are not well conceived and effectively carried out -- normally they are. Nor does it purport that no communication exists -- some obviously does. What does seem to happen, however, is that once one key cell goes on alert, the others follow suit, security tightens and communications then break down.

4. The question of timing also had quite an impact on the psychological climate. Many Guatemalans believed that widespread violence would not emerge until early January -- in part an intuitive assessment based upon past efforts to undermine the electoral campaign and exacerbate traditional pre-election tensions. In addition, the City's ubiquitous grapevine probably had gotten word that the subversives were in fact preparing for action. The fact that the violence began "three weeks early", caught the public by surprise and added to the psychological strains.

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5. Significantly, the violence lasted only nine days and the State of Precaution invoked by the President on December 17 was followed by a generally peaceful Christmas (except for a fire in a sweater factory December 24 now commonly believed to have been set to collect insurance) and New Year's Eve (although a fire in a book store December 31 caused concern, most Guatemalans now believe it to have been caused by a short circuit). But tensions remained high in anticipation of early January violence -- which did not materialize. No important terrorists were apprehended during the period. (NOTE: With the notable exception of PGT Central Committee member Mario SILVA Jonama who was detained during a routine roadblock search because he was carrying a weapon.

~~_____~~ the police failed to identify the well-known communist who was carrying forged papers. Silva was released next day and with a \$5.00 bribe secured his pistol. Not until his concerned family raised a hue and cry that appeared in the press day after his arrest -- and after his release -- did police officials realize that he had slipped through their fingers.) One is forced to the conclusion that logistical inadequacies (vehicles, bombs, etc.) and lack of communication force the subversives into a recuperation period after a brief spate of activity. (President Mendez' tactics are based on the hope that future terrorism will only occur in similarly short surges.)

6. The President announced a carefully worded emergency decree December 17, on the heels of the assassination of well-known, respected and "unobtrusive" Rightist David GUERRA Guzman. Clearly specifying that legitimate political activity would be permitted, the declaration of the State of Precaution met many of the President's objectives: (a) it gave security forces substantially increased search and arrest powers, thus bolstering their sagging morale; (b) it gave the impression of activity in response to a crisis in the country's leadership; and (c) it simultaneously made clear that the President wished to act in a calm and low-key way to the threat while allowing the electoral campaign to continue. The President resisted pressures from friends and representatives of the Fuerzas Vivas to take further action after the rash of arson two days later. Apparently expecting further outbreaks the first of the year, the President extended the decree another 15 days on December 31, permitting it to lapse later in January since the situation continued quiet. By returning to full constitutional guarantees, the President increased his "running room" should new terrorism once again force him to take action.

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7. The case of the guerrillas who first appeared October 4 in Alta Verapaz at the remote drilling camp of a U.S. subsidiary turned full circle during December. Assisted by the addition of two UH-1H (Huey) helicopters, whose accelerated delivery was facilitated by the U.S. Government, Guatemalan troops continued their search for the elusive band which they had last sighted along the Chama Escarpment in northern Quiche. On January 3, an estimated 17 of the band surprisingly appeared in boats near the site of their initial appearance at the Las Tortugas camp. They overpowered the crews of several oil company canoes and sent the boatmen back to camp with word that the guerrillas would soon enter the Las Tortugas camp to pick up more supplies. Unfortunately, the small army detachment assigned to protect the camp mistakenly shot one of the returning boatmen, scaring away the guerrillas who were about ready to land at the boat dock some 3/4 of a mile from the camp site. A military spokesman contributed further to lowering the morale of the company's 200 some-odd workers by announcing that the victim was a "secret collaborator" of the guerrillas. Forty to fifty men resigned, jeopardizing the entire operation, but the military subsequently took steps to increase the detachment, assign more qualified officers and build the confidence of the remaining oil company staff.

8. All things considered, Christmas 1969 left a bleak imprint on the Guatemalan internal security panorama.

DAVIS



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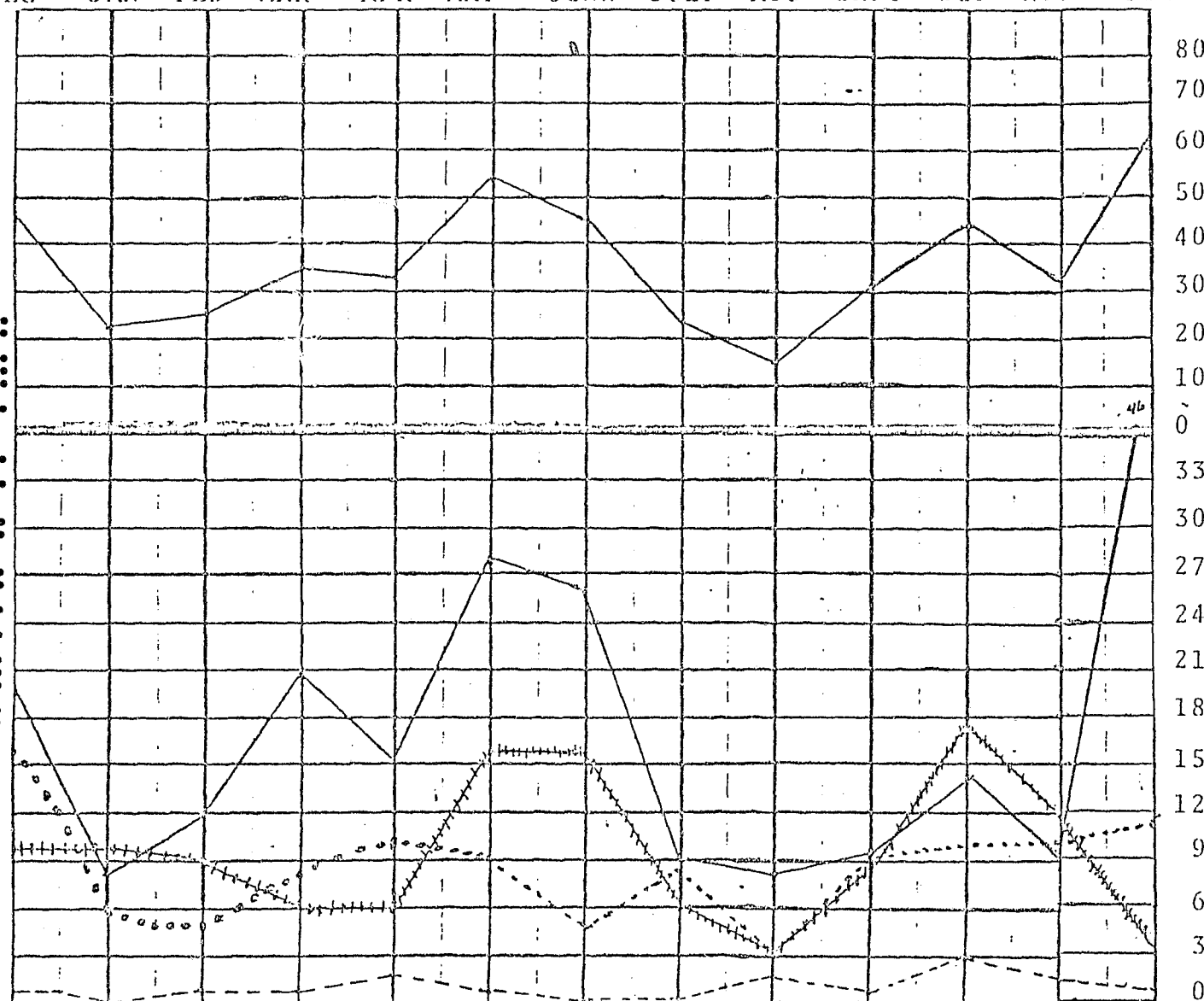
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24 Guatemala

MONTHLY FREQUENCY OF TERRORIST RELATED INCIDENTS BY REGION (1) - DECEMBER 1968 - DECEMBER 1969

DEC JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUNE JULY AUG SEPT OCT NOV DEC



Total - 62

0 - 36 Capital 46 (2)

South Coast 11 (3)

East 4 (4)

Highlands 1 (5)

(1) For purposes of this graph both acts of violence include shootings, bombings, etc., assassinated bodies.

(2) Capital Area: Sacatepequez, Guatemala

(3) South Coast: San Marcos, Quezaltenango, Retalhuleu, Suchitepequez, Escuintla, Santa Rosa

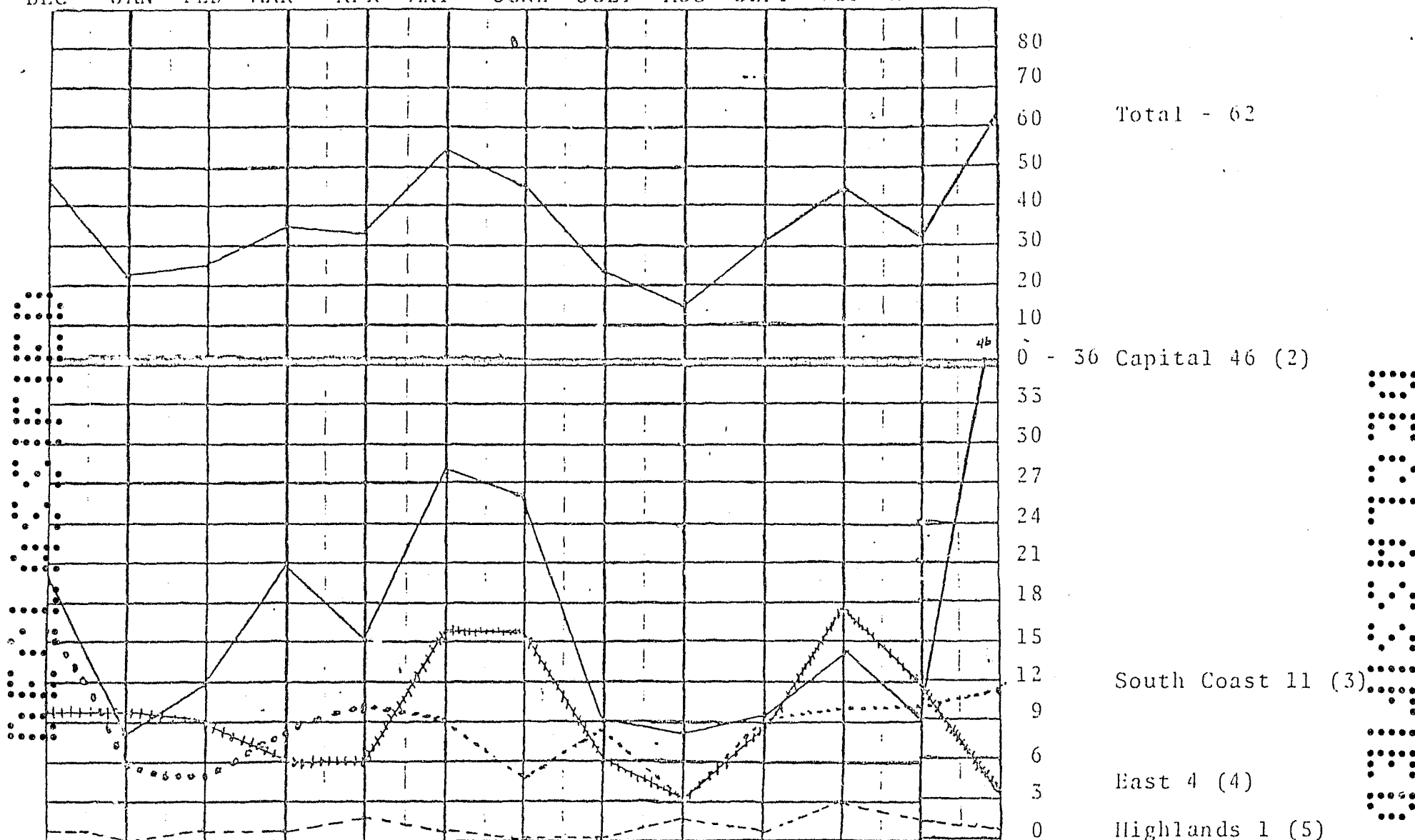
(4) Eastern Region: Jutiapa, Jalapa, El Progreso, Zacapa, Chiquimula, Izabal

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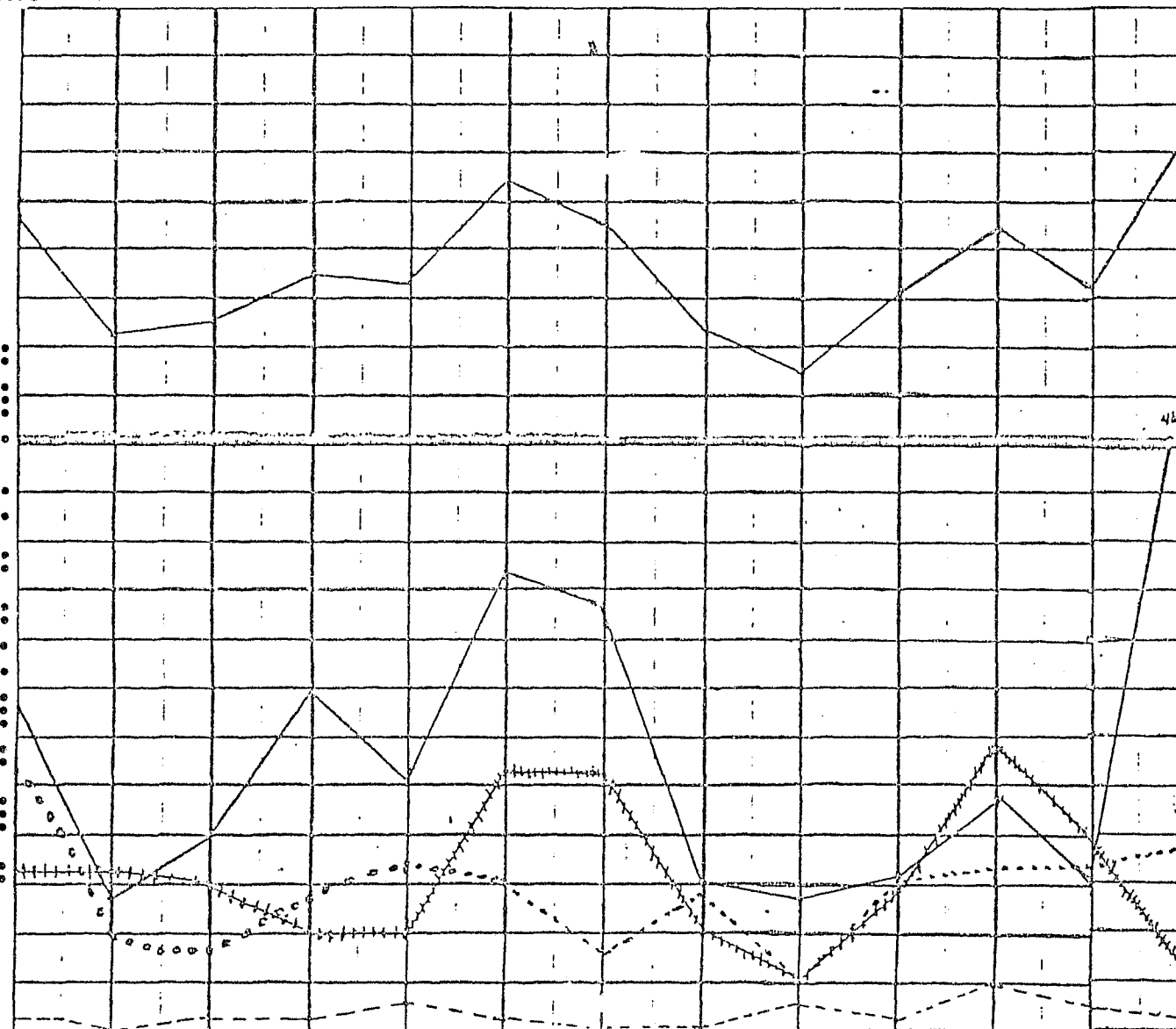
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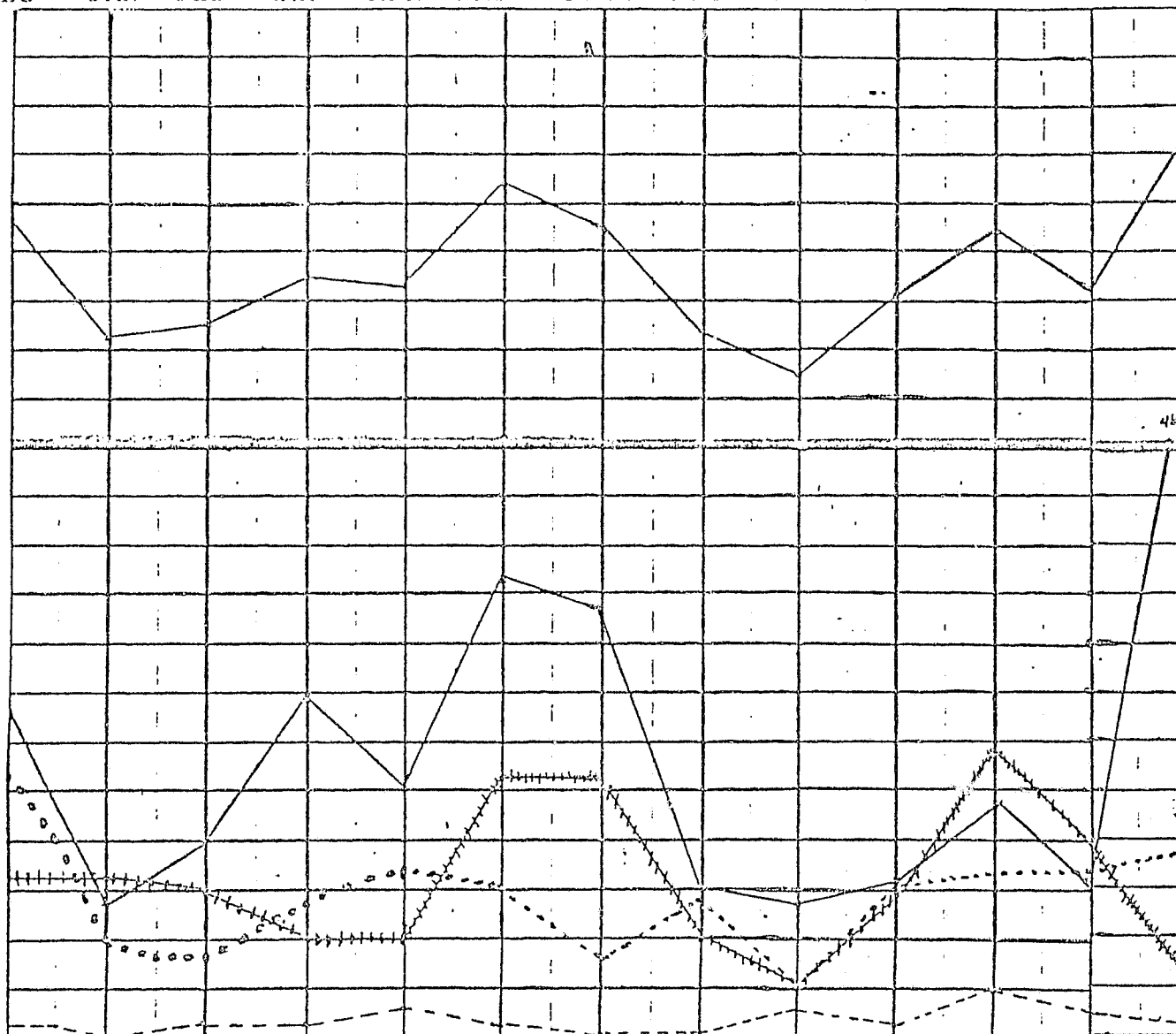
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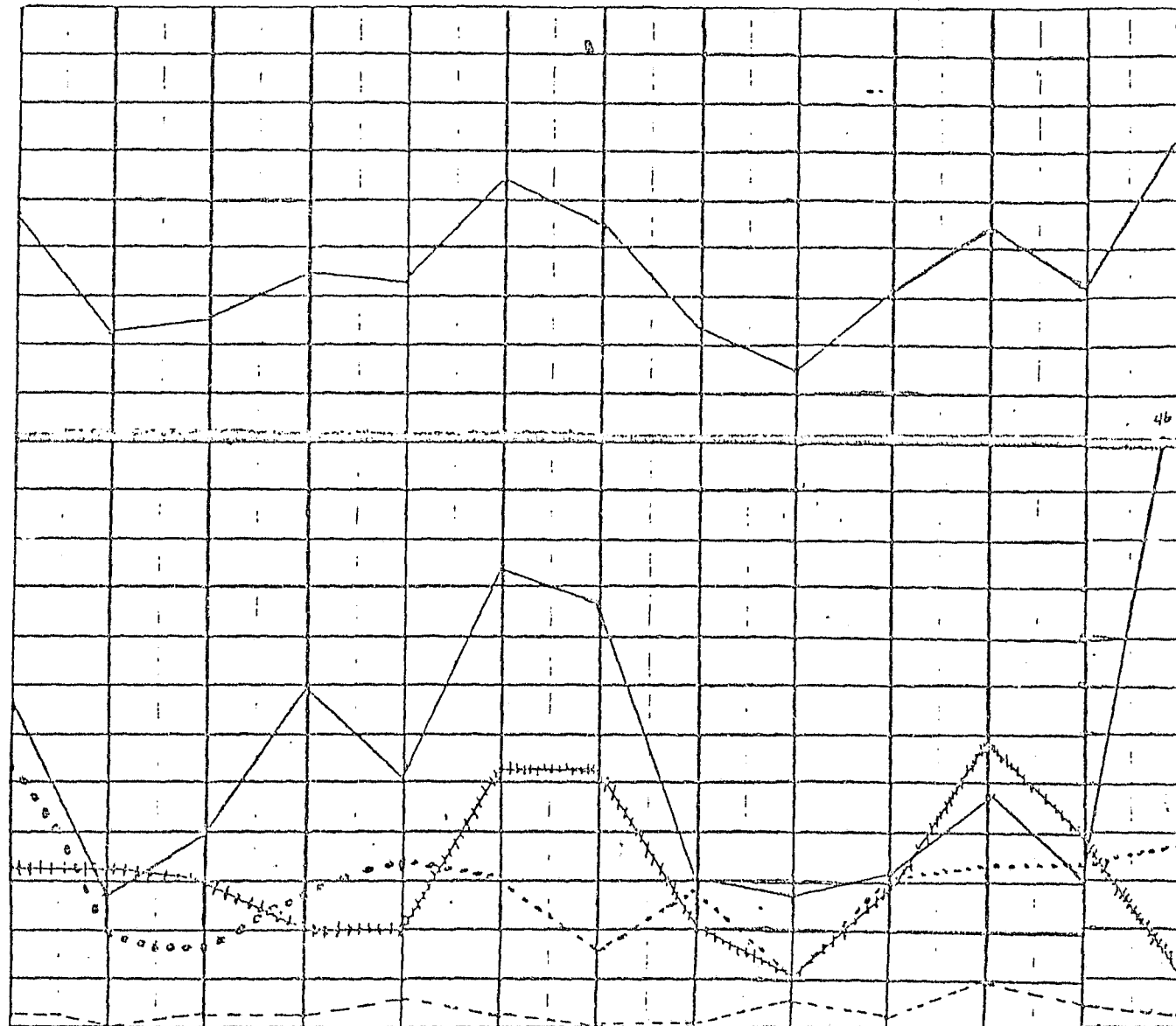
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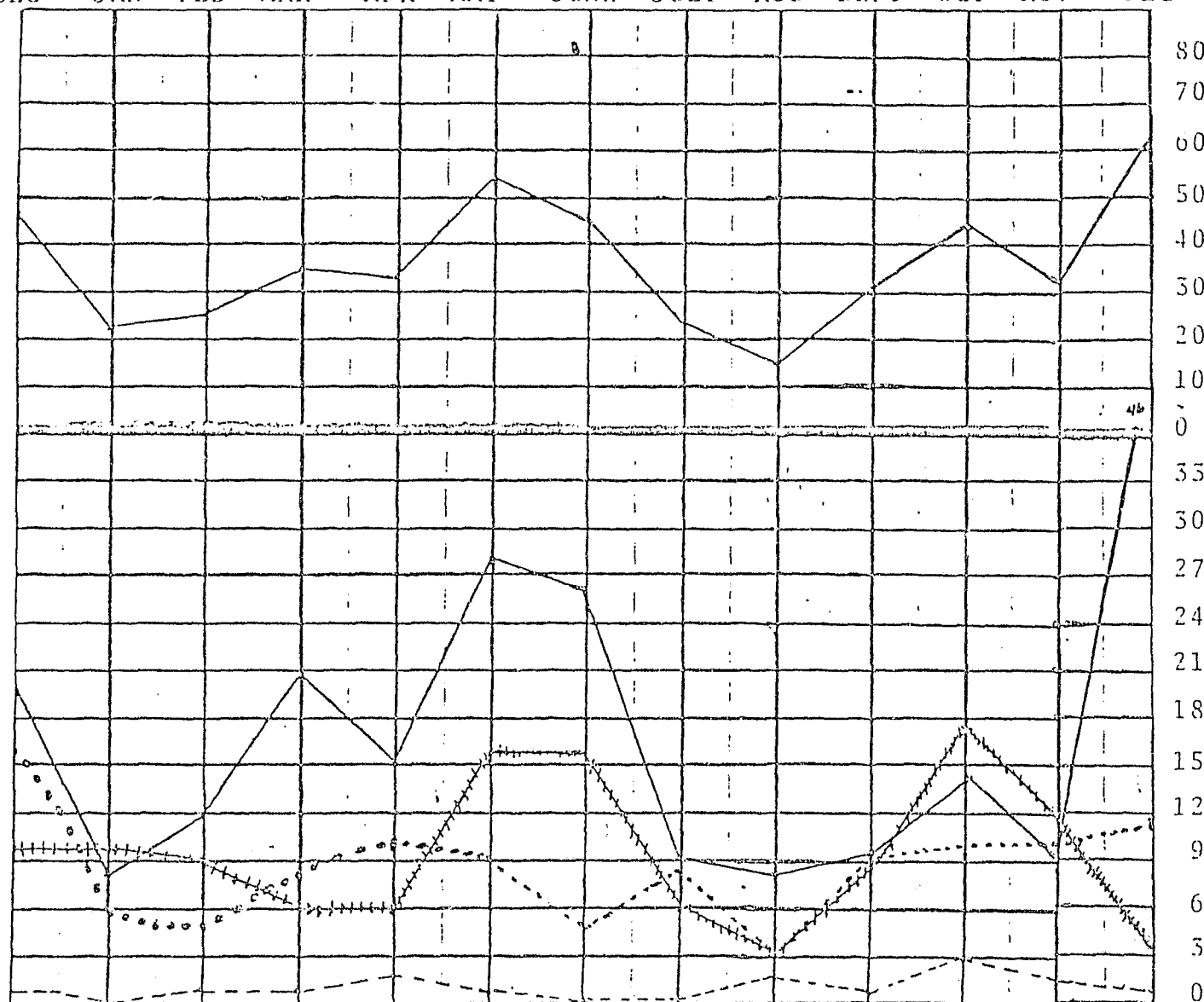
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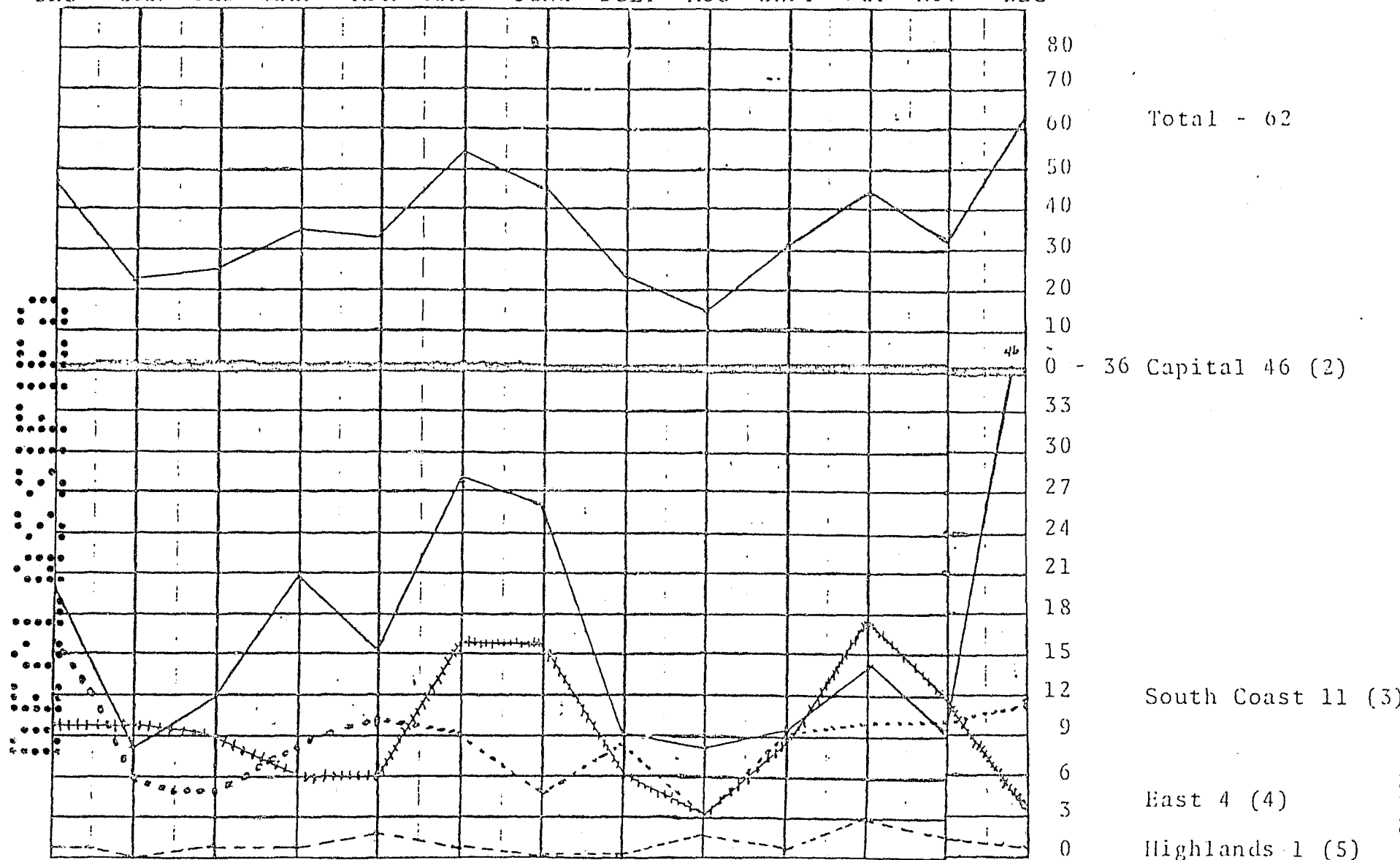
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ENCLOSURE #2
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December 1969

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Dec. 12	G-5193	Conf.	Four Die in Terrorist Attack
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